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FEMA inspectors tour region

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Post-Tribune staff report

Federal disaster inspection teams toured flood-soaked neighborhoods in Lake and Porter counties Thursday, and state officials say the region is almost certain to be declared a federal disaster area, a move that would qualify residents and businesses for major federal aid programs.

Damage in Lake County was well beyond the threshold required to qualify as a federal-level disaster, said Andy Miller, director of the state Office of Disaster Recovery, said Thursday morning as he toured the region with inspectors.

"It's pretty clear-cut in Lake County," Miller said. "In Porter County it's going to take some further assessment before we can make a determination."

Six teams from the federal disaster agency will tour Highland, Lake Station, East Chicago, Gary, Hobart and Munster throughout the day and tally flooding damage, according to Indiana Department of Homeland Security spokeswoman Rachel Mayer. Eight teams from the state Homeland Security office have been in the region since earlier this week.

Gov. Mitch Daniels declared a disaster emergency for the area Tuesday.

FEMA teams will report their findings to federal officials, which could lead to a presidential declaration that the region a disaster, a designation that will free up federal aid for flooded homeowners and businesses. Damage estimates and the number of affected people must reach a certain threshold before federal aid becomes available, Mayer said.

Miller said Wednesday that FEMA could make an announcement as soon as Monday.

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September 18, 2008

Hoosiers get food, respite at schools

'Mother Nature has been hard on us'

By Ben Zion Hershberg

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Indiana's top emergency official visited River Valley Middle School in Jeffersonville yesterday to see how it's being used as a daytime shelter and feeding place for households without electricity, and to talk with local officials about the recovery from Sunday's windstorm.

"Mother Nature has been hard on us in Indiana," said Joe Wainscott, executive director of the Indiana Department of Homeland Security, noting the state was hit by severe flooding in June before the weekend flooding in northwest Indiana and severe winds in the southeast.

Wainscott came to hear what local officials need in state help and to make sure his department's assessment of damage by field officers -- needed to seek federal disaster aid -- is proceeding smoothly.

He urged residents with severe damage to their homes or businesses to call (888) 335-9490 to provide information for the assessment.

Inside the school yesterday, Anna Glenn sat with her daughters Xondrais, 3, and Kyrianna, 1.

"It's awesome they have opened this up," Glenn said. "It's hard not having anything cold to drink and nothing hot to eat. We've been eating snack foods."

The Greater Clark school system opened River Valley Middle and Jonathan Jennings Elementary in Charlestown, to offer meals and showers to residents without power. Both schools were to be available again today.

Kristina Lincoln brought her 10-month old daughter, Kailyah, to River Valley yesterday.

"Our electricity is still out," Lincoln said. "We need showers."

William Yowell said his family has managed to get by without electricity.

"You make do with what you have," said Yowell, who said he cooked outside on a gas grill for his wife and six children. And the family gets to bed early, he said.

But "it's a wonderful help" to be able to eat a meal at the school, he said.

Gabrielle, Yowell's 9-year-old daughter, said staying home this week has been "pretty good" but she misses watching Hannah Montana on TV -- and she misses school. When they get electricity again, Gabrielle said, "I'll be happy to turn the lights on and see where I'm going."

Lack of lights at night also has been a worry for 77-year-old Betty Carpenter, who like the Yowells was eating dinner at River Valley.

"I'm a little shaky" walking in the dark, Carpenter said. "It was wonderful there was something like this available."

In New Albany, meantime, 10 streets remained blocked by tree branches entangled in downed power lines, and Mayor Doug England said reopening them depends on when Duke Energy crews could get the lines restored.

He said city workers were not equipped or trained to deal with the downed lines.

England described the days since Sunday's windstorm as "chaotic," adding that he could sympathize with residents first-hand because "I went two days without it (electricity) myself."

To pick up storm debris, the city has hired two local companies at a cost of about \$18,000 a day to help the street department. They are MAC Construction and 1-800-GOT-JUNK.

England estimated it might take three weeks to collect and clear all the trees and branches. To cover those and other storm-related costs, he said he has asked the City Council -- scheduled to meet tonight -- to authorize the use of about \$250,000 from the city's "rainy day" account.

England estimated storm costs eventually could climb to half a million dollars, including overtime for police, firefighters and other employees.

Reporter Ben Hershberg can be reached at (812) 949-4032.

Reporter Dick Kaukas contributed to this story.

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Chesterton Tribune

State officials will be in Northwest Indiana beginning today to help flood victims negotiate the bureaucracy of recovery.

From 8 a.m. to 8 p.m. both today and Friday, representatives from the Indiana Department of Insurance, Bureau of Motor Vehicles, and the Indiana Housing and Community Development Authority will all be at the Family and Social Services Administration offices in Hammond, Hobart, and Gary.

- In Hammond at 420 Hoffman St.
- In Hobart at 1001 W. 37th Ave.
- In Gary at 661 Broadway.

Additional days and hours will be determined by the end of the week.

Note: the BMV rep will be at the Hobart office today and at the Hammond office on Friday. FSSA and BMV are housed together at the Gary office.

Also note: Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) applications will not—repeat not—be available at these locations.

The Department of Insurance rep will answer questions about any type of insurance. The Housing Authority rep will help identify short-term housing options for families displaced by flood waters. The BMV will assist with such services as replacement driver's licenses and ID cards.

When FEMA?

As soon as the Indiana Department of Homeland Security (DHS) has completed its assessment of damage, Gov. Mitch Daniels will send a formal request for federal assistance to President Bush. The DHS assessment will depend in large part on its receipt of Flood Damage Questionnaires from victims, and because any federal assistance will be determined on a county-wide basis, every single questionnaire received by DHS will increase the chance of Porter County's receiving some level of it.

Municipal officials are therefore urging residents to download the form at http://www.in.gov/dhs/files/damage_quest.doc and then complete it and submit it to the Porter County Emergency Management Agency at 1995 S. Ind. 2. The document is also available at the Chesterton town hall and residents may mail or hand-deliver them there at 726 Broadway, Chesterton, IN 46304.

If President Bush does approve Daniels' request, applications for federal assistance will then become available. FEMA and Small Business Administration applications for assistance are not available at this time.

If and when President Bush approves Daniels' request, the state will open one-stop assistance centers in the region to provide additional state services.

In the meantime, flood victims are urged to report their damage by calling (888) 335-9490. Reports can be filed from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. EDT Monday through Friday. The Indiana Office of Faith Based and Community Initiatives is taking the reports.

Callers will be asked to provide their name, address, phone number, damage to property and type of damage to property. Losses can include structural damage to homes and loss of personal property. This is not an application for any assistance program. It is the part of the process used by the state to request federal assistance.

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[Northwest Indiana Bureau](#)

Lending A Helping Hand To Munster Flood Victims

[Kristyn Hartman](#)

MUNSTER, Ind. (CBS) — It's been a tough few days for the people who have been flooded out of their homes in the Chicago area and northwest Indiana.

CBS 2's Kristyn Hartman reports there are ways you can pitch in with the relief effort.

Flooding in Munster has been the main topic of conversation at WJOV-AM. For days now, callers have jammed the station's lines looking for answers to questions, and to get the word out for people who need help.

"There's really nobody to go to in a larger sense," said morning show host Jim Dedelow. "So we're just trying to direct people to the different fragments to go to."

Dedlow has helped those in need find aid at places like Westminster Presbyterian. The church is taking donations for flood victims, who can stop by and pick up what they need.

"We're here because we lost everything in our basement, our clothes, our cleaning supplies and everything, and we're just trying to get everything so we can get everything back together again," said flood victim Donna Crozier.

Laquita Glass said, "We lost everything. Everything. And then there was sewer water, too, so I had to throw all that in the garbage."

In their cases every bit of relief goes a long way. But they need some items more than others, and they're not alone.

People coordinating the effort, born here just on Tuesday, know what's going fast. They say if you want to make a difference the best things to chip in are cleaning supplies and nonperishable food. And that's not all.

"Money is certainly welcome... in the form of gift cards," said Sally Van Bokkelen of Westminster Presbyterian Church. "Just concern and prayers for other people."

From the looks of it, it seems they have them. At the very least, the people of Munster have each other's backs.

The real work – cleanup – is still before them. They're already compiling lists of volunteers, who will have to have some training because of the conditions at hand. There are volunteer forms at the Munster Town Hall.

You can drop off flood relief donations at the Munster Civic Foundation, 1005 Ridge Road, Munster, Ind., 46321.

(CBS 2 and the Post-Tribune are news partners covering stories in the communities of northwest Indiana. Send story tips to tips@cbs2chicago.com. (© MMVII, CBS Broadcasting, Inc. All Rights Reserved.)

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September 18, 2008

I-80/94 expected to reopen this evening

The Associated Press

State highway officials said Interstate 80/94 in northwestern Indiana should reopen after Thursday evening's rush hour after being closed since the weekend by flooding from Hurricane Ike's remnants.

Crews had hoped to reopen the major route to the Chicago area by midday Thursday, but receding waters washed back onto the lanes, delaying the reopening, Joshua Bingham, a spokesman for the Indiana Department of Transportation, said late Thursday afternoon.

"It looks now like it's going to be in the evening, after rush hour," he said. "But we're still hoping we can open it back up."

Four miles of I-80/94 from the Illinois state line to State Road 51 have been closed since torrential rains flooded sections of its lanes over the weekend.

Crews continued pumping water from the roadway Thursday, but they will also have to sweep debris from the pavement before allowing traffic back onto the highway.

INDOT is uncertain when it will reopen Interstate 65 northbound, which was closed at U.S. 24 to ease traffic headed into northwestern Indiana.

The Indiana Department of Homeland Security reported Thursday afternoon that more than 67,000 customers remained without power, including customers of Duke, Vectren and rural electric providers. About 1,880 people near Corydon and Seymour were without phone service.

Homeland Security said that Harrison REMC informed the state that sections of Floyd County may not have power restored until next Wednesday.

In adjacent Clark County, a Jeffersonville middle school was opened Wednesday to offer meals and showers to residents without power. Anna Glenn brought her daughters - Xondrais, 3, and Kyrianna, 1 - to River Valley Middle School on Wednesday.

"It's awesome they have opened this up," Glenn said. "It's hard not having anything cold to drink and nothing hot to eat. We've been eating snack foods."

Joe Wainscott, executive director of state Homeland Security, visited the school Wednesday. He noted that the state was hit by flooding in June and now it's dealing with flooding in northern Indiana and wind damage in southern Indiana caused by Ike's remains.

"Mother Nature has been hard on us in Indiana," Wainscott said.

Flooding persisted Thursday in parts of northern Indiana, prompting Indiana University Northwest in Gary to cancel classes for a fourth consecutive day.

Floodwaters began to recede from campus commons areas on Wednesday, but many parking lots

remained under water, school officials said. Crews were still working to pump water out of the mechanical rooms or crawl spaces of several buildings.

Purdue University Calumet held classes on its Hammond campus Thursday but warned students to allow plenty of time to get to campus because travel remains slow in the area.

Preliminary damage assessments were being conducted in Lake County, where Homeland Security said about 500 homes were reported as severely damaged.

One home in Munster exploded Wednesday, damaging several others nearby. The area had previously been evacuated and the homes were empty.

The cause of the explosion was not immediately clear, but Town Manager Thomas DeGiulio said gas continued to flow to some houses because crews were struggling to cut gas to all homes in the flooded area.

"They can't find the meters because they're so deep underwater," DeGiulio said.

"This only reinforces why we don't want people going back into these houses."

Neighborhood resident Mark Steinken said he felt sick when he heard the explosion.

"This has been one misery after the other," he said.

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September 17, 2008

No power, water for some storm victims

Associated Press

NORTH VERNON, Ind. — Damage from weekend wind storms that raked the state left thousands of southeastern Indiana residents facing the prospect today of no electricity until next week, little water and even shortages of gasoline to power their cars and generators.

About 80 percent of rural Jennings County still had no electricity Wednesday morning, and 700 to 800 residents in two townships had no water, said Michelle Evans, the county's emergency management director.

Statewide, major power companies still had more than 70,000 customers without service this morning, the Indiana Department of Homeland Security said, although those figures did not include REMCs that power many rural areas.

In northwest Indiana, Gov. Mitch Daniels declared a state of disaster in flooded Lake and Porter counties after surveying waterlogged communities by air and boat Tuesday.

Duke Energy, the state's largest power company, reported 55,477 customers still without power, down from the total of 368,091 that lost service after remnants of Hurricane Ike blasted the state Sunday with high winds, toppling trees and power lines.

Evans said Duke was only one of the five power companies serving her county about 50 miles north of Louisville, Ky. She said she's been told she won't have power back to her own home before the weekend.

"I can't even begin to tell you how much food has been lost," Evans said.

Rick Graham of the town of Commiskey worried that he might lose a freezer full of food.

"We gotta keep some kind of power going, and the generator's all we've got," he said. Water was another concern. "We ain't got enough water pressure to really fill up a bucket full of water."

Mike Jones, a 58-year-old Bloomington resident who has survived two heart attacks, keeps insulin refrigerated to treat his diabetes, and also relies on an electricity-powered oxygen tank. He said Duke Energy told him he might not have power until Saturday.

"I'll tell ya what I miss — my television. I love Westerns. And right now I'm jonesin'. I ain't seen a cowboy in four days," Jones told The Herald-Times of Bloomington.

Duke spokeswoman Angeline Protogere said a downed power line feeding a substation that supplies power to a Jennings County REMC would be repaired Wednesday, but she said the company had substations down all across its Indiana service territory, which covers much of the southern two-thirds of the state.

Lt. Gov. Becky Skillman toured parts of southern Indiana on Tuesday.

"I could not have imagined this much destruction from a wind event. We've seen far more damage than the aftermath of a number of tornadoes," Skillman said.

Indiana Homeland Security said most of the gas stations in Dearborn County in the far southeast corner of the state had run out of fuel, and distributors also had run out of fuel.

Dearborn County's emergency management director, Bill Black Jr., said motorists from nearby Ohio and Kentucky, where gas stations were left without power, had created a run on gas in the Lawrenceburg area. But he said more fuel was on its way.

"Tankers are coming in. They're getting replenished now," Black said Wednesday morning.

Homeland Security Director Joseph Wainscott Jr. was touring Jennings County and other parts of southern Indiana Wednesday, spokeswoman Rachel Meyer said.

Northern Indiana's weekend deluge of rain — up to a foot in some areas — left road crews still working Wednesday morning to pump water from swamped lanes of Interstate 80/94, four days after State Police closed the highway and Interstate 65 because of high water.

Andy Dietrick, a spokesman for the state Department of Transportation, said Wednesday that it was unclear when the highways might reopen. Once the water recedes and roads are dry, engineers will check the structural integrity of the roads, bridges and overpasses.

"We have a lot of guys out working on it but the water hasn't gone down much," he said.

Tolls were temporarily waived on part of the Indiana Toll Road near the Illinois state line to help clear traffic.

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